Feedvisor

The Q4 Readiness Checklist

18 Advertising and Pricing Decisions Brands Should Lock In Before Peak Season

Last holiday season set a record: **consumers spent $257.8 billion online between November 1 and December 31,** according to Adobe Analytics. But growth slowed to 6.8%, as shoppers became more deliberate about where and how they spent.

This year, brands are navigating an even more complicated environment. Consumers are watching every dollar, economic uncertainty is shaping purchase decisions, and AI is changing how shoppers discover and evaluate products, while making trust harder to earn.

Use this checklist to pressure-test 18 critical areas across advertising, pricing, competition, inventory, and post-holiday planning to ensure a successful Q4. Mark each **Ready, Gap, or Not applicable.** Anything marked Gap should leave this document with an owner and a date.

REVIEW AND MARK WHERE YOU ARE WITH EACH PART:

PART 1

Advertising Readiness

1. Budgets are set against a Q4 cost assumption, not a Q3 baseline. *Auction costs climb into peak. A budget built on current CPCs will deliver materially less volume than planned at exactly the wrong moment. Model your key campaigns at a higher cost-per-click and decide now whether you fund the gap or accept lower impression share.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

2. Each campaign has a target tied to its actual job, not one blended ROAS. *Prospecting, defense, and harvest campaigns do different work on different time horizons. Holding all of them to a single efficiency target quietly starves the ones building future demand. Assign targets by campaign purpose.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

3. Branded defense coverage is confirmed on your highest-revenue terms. *Competitor conquesting intensifies in Q4. Confirm your own brand terms are covered before you find out the expensive way.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

4. Pacing and dayparting rules are set for deal events specifically. *Deal-day traffic is front-loaded and doesn't respect standard pacing. Campaigns that exhaust budget by mid-morning leave the rest of the day to competitors. Decide deliberately whether you're pacing evenly or spending into peak hours.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

PART 2

Pricing Foundations

5. Price floors are set from contribution margin using current cost structure. *A flat "never below 20% off" rule treats every ASIN as if it has the same economics. Floors calculated from landed cost, referral and fulfillment fees, and ad spend give you a number you can discount against without guessing — but only if the inputs are current. Peak-season fulfillment surcharges and any COGS or freight changes since you last set floors all move real break-even. Floors set in spring are usually optimistic by Q4.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

6. Returns are in the margin math, at Q4 rates. *Returns from December land in January but belong to December revenue. In gifting-heavy categories the difference between an annual average return rate and a Q4 rate is large enough to turn a profitable peak into an unprofitable one on paper you won't see until February.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

7. You know which ASINs you're willing to lose money on, and why. *Loss leaders are a legitimate strategy — for launches, for share defense, for driving subscriptions. The problem is unintentional ones. Every ASIN priced below contribution-margin breakeven should be on a list someone approved.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

8. Promotional pricing is sequenced backward from your highest-stakes event. *Deep discounting early in the season can affect the reference price Amazon uses to validate later deal submissions and strike-through display. Build your promotional calendar backward from the event that matters most, not forward from the next one on the calendar.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

PART 3

Channel Alignment

12. You have an active plan for unauthorized sellers and MAP violations. *Q4 is when third-party sellers surface on your listings with inventory sourced through channels you didn't approve. One seller undercutting you on your own ASIN breaks every floor you set in Part 2. Know who is monitoring, how often, and what the enforcement path is — before the volume arrives.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

13. Your off-Amazon pricing is aligned with your Amazon promotional calendar. *Amazon's Buy Box behavior responds to prices found elsewhere. An aggressive DTC promotion or a retail partner's doorbuster can suppress your own Amazon Buy Box, and the two events are rarely connected by the teams running them. Get the calendars in the same room.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

PART 4

Inventory-Aware Decisions

14. Ad spend is linked to inventory position on your top ASINs. *Spending into a hero ASIN that stocks out mid-flight wastes budget and makes rank recovery harder. At minimum, know which ASINs are at risk and who pauses spend if cover drops below threshold.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

15. You have a plan for overstocked ASINs that isn't just discounting. *Excess inventory heading into January carries storage cost, which makes late-Q4 markdowns tempting. Advertising into an overstocked item at a controlled bid is often the better lever, because a price cut is much harder to walk back than a bid is.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

PART 5

After Peak

16. You have a plan for the last week of December and the first weeks of January. *Traffic stays elevated after Christmas — gift card redemption, self-gifting, returns-and-replacements — while many competitors have mentally closed the year and pulled back. Advertising costs often ease in the same window. Teams that plan for this period rather than coasting through it capture volume at better efficiency than they saw all quarter.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

17. Price restoration has a named owner and a date. *Promotional prices that linger into Q1 erode margin quietly and can complicate later deal eligibility. Know who is moving prices back, when, and what happens if an automated rule is holding a promotional price in place.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

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Operating Cadence

18. You've defined what gets watched daily versus weekly during peak. *Everything feels urgent in Q4, which means nothing gets proper attention. A short daily list — Buy Box status on hero ASINs, budget exhaustion, inventory alerts, price anomalies, new sellers on your listings — plus a weekly review of everything else keeps a team functional through a six-week sprint.*

☐ *READY* ☐ *GAP* ☐ *N/A*

Scoring

15–18 READY: *You're in good shape. Spend remaining prep time on the response plans in items 10, 12, and 14 — those are the ones that fail under pressure, because they require a decision at the moment you have least time to make one.*

10–14 READY: *Typical. Prioritize the pricing foundations in Part 2. Gaps there compound through every promotion you run, and they're the hardest to correct mid-quarter.*

9 OR FEWER READY: *There's real exposure here. Start with items 1, 5, and 14 - budget assumptions, margin floors, and inventory-linked spend account for most avoidable Q4 losses.*